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Overview of Sepsis

Sepsis can be most simply defined as a spectrum of clinical conditions caused by the immune response of a host to infection or trauma and characterized by systemic inflammation and coagulation (Mesters, 1996a; Wheeler, 1999). It ranges from a systemic inflammatory response to organ dysfunction to multiple organ failure, and ultimately death for many patients.

Particularly in elderly, immunocompromised, and critically ill patients, sepsis is a major cause of morbidity and mortality in intensive care units (ICUs) worldwide (Friedman, 1998; Balk, 2000). In the US, ~~sepsis is the leading cause of death in noncoronary ICU patients (Sands, 1997)~~, while recent 1998 data from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) show that it is the 11th leading cause of death overall (National Vital Statistics Report, 2000).*

With the great and prolonged morbidity associated with sepsis and the intensive care required, the healthcare expenditures for treating patients with sepsis in the US are profound. Despite enormous investment in intensive care, sepsis has been associated with mortality rates ranging from 28% to 50% (Natanson, 1997; Zeni, 1998).

*Based on data for septicemia

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